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SECURITY COUNCIL DISCUSSES FUTURE OF U.N. PROGRAMS IN IRAQ

Negroponte says coalition will search for WMD for the time being

By Judy Aita
Washington File Correspondent

United Nations -- The U.N. Security Council continued discussions on a possible U.N. role in post-war Iraq April 22, holding separate meetings with the chief U.N. weapons inspector and the head of the oil-for-food program.

In a surprise move, France's representative told journalists that his government would press for the immediate suspension of sanctions imposed on Iraq 12 years ago after the invasion of Kuwait, suspending them even before Iraq was certified clear of weapons of mass destruction. The oil-for food program, Ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sabliere said, should be retained with some modifications for the time being.

U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte said, "We believe that because of the dramatically changed circumstances in Iraq that sanctions should be lifted as soon as possible. So we now need to work with France and other countries to see how best that can be achieved and how quickly."

Speaking with journalists after the council's private meeting with Hans Blix, chairman of the U.N. Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), Negroponte also said that during the meeting he explained to council members "the various

types of activities that the coalition envisaged undertaking in terms of interviewing scientists, examining documents, going to all the different suspected sites,” in an effort to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction.

Negroponte said he told the council that “the entire atmosphere has changed now, and hopefully this will enable Iraqis, any Iraqi who was familiar with the past activities in this sphere, to speak more freely and speak without fear of retribution.”

He noted that “a couple of important scientific figures have either been captured or have turned themselves in.”

Blix told the council that UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should return to Iraq in order to bring international credibility to Iraqi disarmament.

However, the U.S. ambassador said that “for the time being and for the foreseeable future” the United States sees the search for Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction “as being a coalition activity.”

“The coalition has assumed responsibility for enforcing pertinent U.N. Security Council resolutions and conducting the operation of disarming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction,” Negroponte said. It is a military operation “led and coordinated” by military personnel.

Negroponte also pointed out that the council session was an “informational meeting,” not a decision-making meeting, and therefore council members did not get into a detailed discussion on what might happen to UNMOVIC in the future.

Arriving at his office, Blix told journalists that “the purpose of setting up of the UNMOVIC was to have an independent verification, one that was not on a leash from any government and I am sure that the council would want to persist in that attitude.”

Blix told the council that UNMOVIC would have to adapt its work program to take into account the findings of the coalition forces in order to corroborate any findings.

“I find it entirely natural that the coalition authorities, which entered Iraq, established units devoted to the search for and identification of weapons of mass destruction and other proscribed items,” he said. “In the phase of active hostilities, the finding and neutralizing of such

items was evidently a matter of security. ... [T]he search for these weapons and control of them would appear to be a logical part of the operations.”

Blix noted that he publicly wished the coalition forces every success “in finding the truth about the weapons, which, at UNMOVIC, we have concluded could exist and which several governments are convinced do exist.”

“I have no doubt about the determination of these units to work objectively,” he said.

Nevertheless, the international community is interested in the outcome, and several Security Council decisions affecting the sanctions rest upon the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, Blix noted.

U.N. resolutions require that “any destruction of proscribed items should take place under international supervision. This would seem still advisable for international credibility,” Blix said. “The long-term international monitoring program envisaged by the resolutions may continue to be required to maintain a high-level of confidence in the region and the world.”

UNMOVIC has 85 inspectors who can be recalled for inspection work at any time, Blix said. Looters took much of UNMOVIC’s equipment and office material in it’s Baghdad center at the Canal Hotel, but the office could be back to limited operations within two weeks after a return of staff. Laboratories for screening chemical and biological samples could be reactivated relatively soon.

The UNMOVIC chief also told the council that there had been “serious errors” in the translation of some of the interviews he had given to various news media during the course of the war. He denied that he had said that any government fabricated evidence to influence inspectors.

“I have at no time suggested that the war was a foregone conclusion,” Blix continued. “I have stated as my impression that U.S. patience with further inspections seemed to run out at about the same time as our Iraqi counterparts began to be proactive in proposing new investigations, supplying more explanations and names. I did not imply that there was any casual link.”

Blix also said that he would leave his post when his contract expires June 1 and will not consider staying on beyond that time.

In a statement released at IAEA headquarters in Vienna, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei said that "the IAEA should resume its work in Iraq as soon as possible."

"The IAEA continues to be the sole organization with legal powers -- derived from both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and successive Security Council resolutions -- to verify Iraq's nuclear disarmament. We await the guidance of the council as to the modalities of our return," ElBaradei said.

The IAEA has advised the coalition forces about the need for the physical protection of Iraq's declared nuclear material, and provided information about the location of radioactive sources.

Benon Sevan, executive director of the U.N. Office of the Iraq Program, discussed the oil-for-food program under which Baghdad sold oil to buy humanitarian supplies under U.N. supervision. On March 28, the Security Council authorized the secretary general to make the necessary adjustments to the program in order to use the more than \$10 billion in the oil-for-food program to provide emergency humanitarian aid to Iraqi civilians under current conditions for an initial period of 45 days.

Now the role and future of the oil-for-food program is complicated. The program has been unable to untangle the web of contracts for a wide range of supplies that include spare parts for Iraq's oil industry and redirect them to provide food and medicine. It is expected the program will only be able to deliver a small portion of aid by the May 12 deadline set by the council resolution. Most importantly, the question of who will oversee Iraq's oil sales once production is resumed is expected to be a hotly debated issue in the council.

U.S. SEEKS CHANCES TO WORK WITH ALLIES TO HELP IRAQIS, BOUCHER SAYS

State spokesman responds to criticism of department from Gingrich

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

The United States is interested in working with its allies to improve the lives of Iraqis, says Richard Boucher, the State Department spokesman.

During the April 22 daily press briefing, Boucher was asked by reporters if the United States would "punish" those countries that opposed the U.S. stance on the need for military action to remove the regime of Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

"We have made clear," Boucher replied, "that there are opportunities to work with allies in the reconstruction of Iraq, in bringing a better life for the Iraqi people." He said there are opportunities to work with allies on other issues, but acknowledged that "recent events, disagreements will have an effect on our views and our relationships."

When asked about the possibility of organizing a donors' conference for Iraq, Boucher said it was too soon for such an undertaking.

The State Department, the departments of Defense and Treasury, he said, "have been working closely together with other donors to try to organize the international effort, not only the humanitarian effort, but also the reconstruction effort over the longer term." He noted that there were many discussions about aid for Iraq at the International Monetary Fund/World Bank spring meetings in Washington April 12-13.

"We are actively and continuously coordinating with other potential donors," the spokesman said. "There is general recognition that needs assessment by the World Bank, possibly by the UNDP [United Nations Development Program], could be a valuable part of the process of organizing relief and reconstruction for the Iraqi people."

But that process may take weeks to months before a donors' conference could be contemplated, he said.

Boucher was asked to respond to criticism of the State Department from Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the House of Representatives who is now a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a Washington think tank.

In a speech delivered April 22 at AEI, Gingrich said the State Department, in the lead-up to the Iraq war, "remained ineffective and incoherent." He also accused the State Department of obstructing President Bush's policy goals.

"The State Department is here to carry out the President's policy," Boucher said. "We're doing that effec-

tively. We're doing that loyally, and we're doing that diligently, and we're doing that with a fair amount of creativity and accomplishment."

As for the State Department's relationship with Congress, Boucher said that Secretary Colin Powell "appears at more congressional hearings ... than any previous Secretary of State. ... So, there's no lack of congressional oversight; there's no lack of coordination with the Congress."

Boucher was asked if press reports saying that the State Department was at odds with the White House and Defense Department would hurt U.S. efforts abroad.

"People will judge us by what we do," Boucher replied. "People will judge us by whether we bring a better life for the people of Iraq. ... People will judge us by whether we work with our allies on issues around the world. ... I think we're fairly confident that the facts of the president's policy will speak louder than the debates inside the beltway or the think tanks of Washington."

USTR ZOELICK URGES EU TO ACCEPT AGRICULTURAL POLICY REFORM

Without change WTO negotiations unlikely to progress, he says

By Andrzej Zwanecki
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations are unlikely to move forward unless European Union (EU) member states go along with types of agricultural policy reforms proposed by the EU governing body, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick says.

In April 22 remarks to an annual conference of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, Zoellick expressed hope that EU countries will align their foreign policies and economic interests with those of the international economy, the WTO, and the developing world by accepting the main features of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms proposed by the European Commission.

In July 2002 the commission put forward a proposal to

spend less money on agricultural market subsidies and more on rural development. Under the proposal, support would be shifted away from boosting production and toward meeting tough environmental, animal welfare, and food safety standards. The EU is still debating the plan.

Earlier Zoellick had said that while the EU's CAP proposals are not sufficient to advance the WTO talks, they are "definitely" necessary.

At the end of March WTO members missed the deadline for agreeing on modalities, or specific details and time frames, for the agriculture negotiations.

Zoellick said that he and negotiators from some other countries believe that the WTO negotiations need to focus now on a limited number of issues -- especially on market access in agriculture, consumer and industrial goods, and services -- to move forward before the WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, in September. While agriculture is the "critical" issue, he said, the United States wants to "see what else we can do to push along negotiations in other areas." He said U.S. negotiators working with other countries are trying to find areas of common interest to advance the process.

On another issue, Zoellick said his office is working on initiatives that would boost development in, and U.S. trade with, Middle Eastern countries in the aftermath of the successful U.S. military campaign in Iraq.

He said the United States needs to capitalize on an impetus for change emerging in the region as a result of demographic and social changes, as well as the growing awareness of regional developmental problems. Zoellick said he hopes that a free trade agreement (FTA) the Bush administration is negotiating with Morocco will provide an incentive for other countries in the region to introduce reforms that would make them potential candidates for closer economic relationships with the United States.

He said the Bush administration is supporting customs reform and a better intellectual property regime in Egypt as a way of moving that country towards a potential FTA. In 2002, Zoellick was the first U.S. trade representative to visit Egypt. He said that a number of countries in the region, including Egypt, have signed trade and investment framework agreements with the United States, agreements which might be a good starting point for any FTA negotiations.

Zoellick suggested that other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, could create an opportunity for intensifying trade with the United States and other partners by moving closer to WTO membership. Negotiations on Saudi Arabia's application to join the WTO have been in progress since 1996.

U.S. DISEASE CENTER ISSUES ALERT ON TRAVEL TO TORONTO

More caution recommended for travel to areas of SARS outbreak

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) April 22 issued an alert for anyone traveling to Toronto, Canada, because of the occurrence there of numerous cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

CDC Director Julie Gerberding said at a news briefing at CDC headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, that the alert is "no reason to stay home," but she urged visitors to Toronto to avoid areas where they could be exposed to the viral disease, such as hospitals and health care settings.

The global accounting of SARS cases issued by the World Health Organization April 22 showed 139 cases of the pneumonia-like illness reported in Canada, with 13 deaths. In total, 3947 cases have been reported in 25 countries, with 228 deaths.

Gerberding said all of the Canadian cases have occurred in people who have recently traveled to the epidemic's epicenter in Asia, or have had close contact with an individual who has.

Health officials have the greatest concern about cases of the disease in which the chain of transmission can not be traced from one patient to the next. For instance, Hong Kong health authorities are trying to determine how the virus, related to that which causes the common cold, may have been passed among several score residents of the same apartment building. One theory suggests that improper sewage disposal may have allowed transmission through fecal matter.

CDC has issued a more rigorous travel warning for Hong Kong and other Asian sites of the outbreak, advising that nonessential travel to these areas be postponed.

The SARS death rate is also rising, Gerberding announced at the Atlanta briefing. SARS was killing about 4 percent of the patients infected in the first several weeks of the outbreak, but now Gerberding said the death rate has risen to 5.9 percent.

Gerberding cautioned about over-interpreting what that statistic may mean. "If you see the death rate go up, it's not necessarily because it's getting worse," she said. The CDC director explained that the percentage of deaths may climb as the tests to detect the virus become more precise.

An unprecedented degree of collaboration among teams of health researchers and experts resulted in a rapid identification of the pathogen that causes SARS, but Gerberding was not able to report that an effective treatment has been identified as a result of that partnership. "We don't have any evidence that any specific treatment is effective," she said, but tests are continuing on the effectiveness of a variety of proven anti-viral medications.

CDC has issued general advice for travelers who are heading to areas affected by the disease. It is available at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel_advice.htm

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